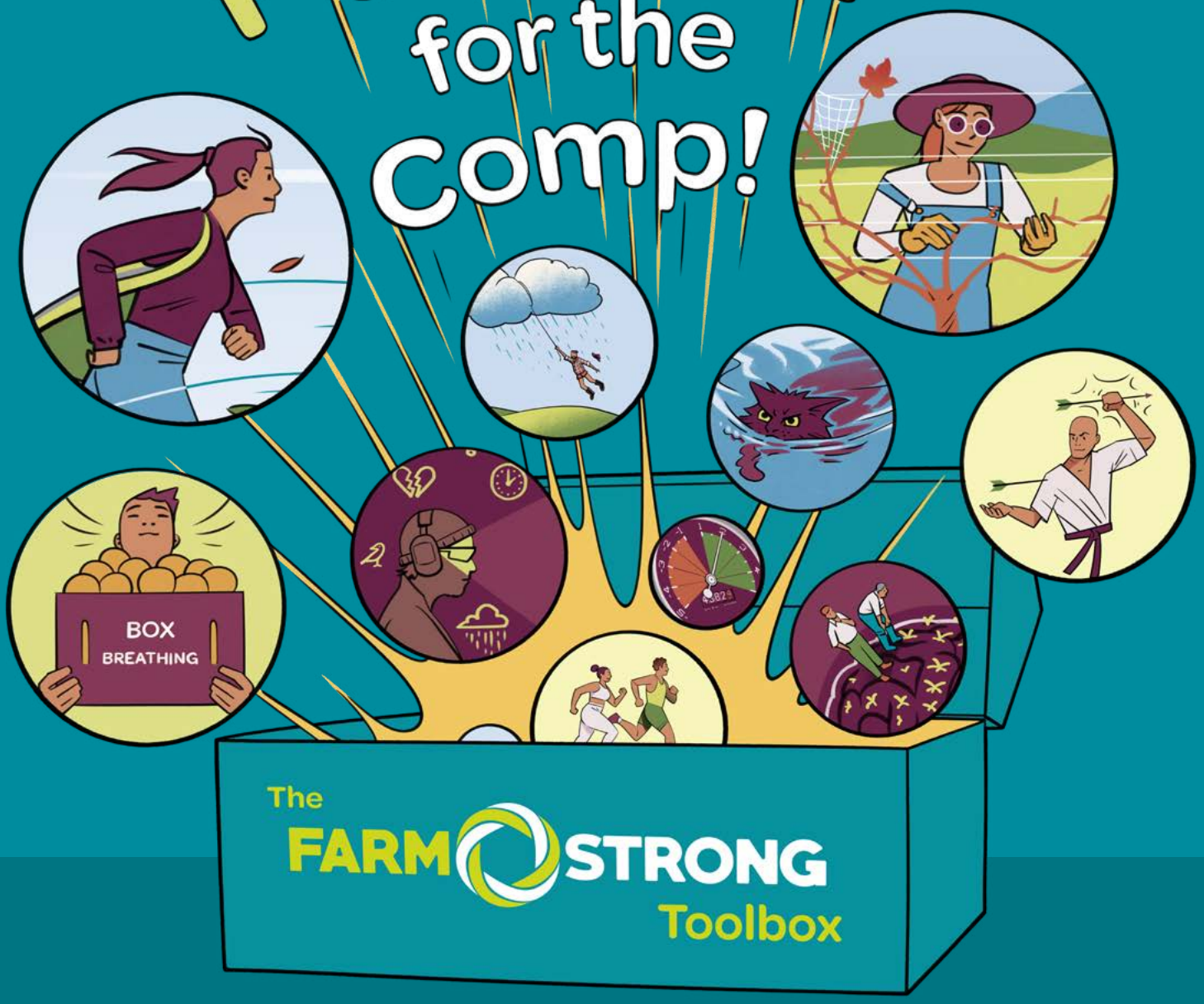
Power Up for the Comp!



FARM STRONG
Live Well Farm Well

NZ YOUNG FARMERS

Power Up Your Mental Fitness

My career as an All Black taught me that the way we think about day-to-day challenges can have a huge impact on how well we perform under pressure.

My approach to pressure has always been to lean into it and see it as a privilege rather than a burden. A chance to test myself and learn a lot along the way. Pressure gave me the opportunity to constantly improve my skills and grow as a person – win, lose or draw.

It's no different now I'm back on farm. The pressures may be different – the weather, the markets, a long to-do list – but the dynamics are the same. Pressure is pressure, whether you're a farmer or a rugby player.

So how do I deal with pressure nowadays? I still travel towards it, embrace it as a normal part of farming and then, when I get the opportunity, I step away from it and make sure I do the things that fill my cup and help me to recharge.

The good news is just like you can go to a gym to become physically fitter, there are mental skills you can learn to build your resilience under pressure.

That's what this resource is all about – it's full of practical tools to help you think more flexibly, to help you get through and perform at your best even when you're feeling 'under the pump'.

Managing the ups and downs of competition is a lot easier when you approach them with the right mindset. Mental skills like avoiding common thinking traps, catching and changing unhelpful thoughts, 'reframing' tough situations and using grounding strategies can all help you perform better and maintain a clear headspace during the heat of the moment.



I'd like to congratulate everyone who's entered this year's NZ Young Farmers competition. It's one of the absolute standouts on the rural calendar and a great way to bring rural communities together.

I am also really pleased that NZ Young Farmers and Farmstrong have partnered up to bring you this toolbox resource and help you prepare for the comp so you can get the most out it and take it back to your farm, family and friends. Different things work for different people, so have a read, find out what works for you and lock it in.

Best of luck!

Samuel Whitelock
Farmstrong Ambassador



More than just a farming competition

The FMG Young Farmer of the Year is more than a competition. It is an opportunity to test yourself and discover how you respond when the pressure comes on, the challenge is unfamiliar and the answer is not immediately obvious.

Success in the contest is not simply about what you know. It is also about how you think, how you manage pressure, how you recover from setbacks and whether you can stay focused when things do not go to plan. These are the foundations of a strong performance mindset, and they matter just as much in farming, leadership and life as they do on competition day.

That is why this programme matters. Mental wellbeing and resilience are not abstract ideas; they are practical skills that can be learned, strengthened and applied. The tools in this workbook are designed to help you perform at your best while also looking after yourself and those around you.

My encouragement is simple: get into it. Be open, take part and give yourself permission to have fun. You do not need to have everything figured out, and you do not have to get everything right.



Test yourself, learn from the experience and support the people alongside you. Whatever the result, you should leave the Contest knowing more about yourself, and stronger for having taken part.

Cheyne Gillooly
Chief Executive, NZ Young Farmers



> " Success in the contest is not simply about what you know. It is also about **how you think, how you manage pressure, how you recover from setbacks and whether you can stay focused** when things do not go to plan."
>
> **Cheyne Gillooly** | Chief Executive, NZ Young Farmers

"If you want to be Farmstrong start by looking after the basics well, things like your sleep, eating well and scheduling in downtime. The best approach is to build simple, daily habits into your life."

Sam Whitelock | Farmstrong Ambassador



Looking After the Basics



The 5 Ways to Wellbeing

The power of daily habits

The science of wellbeing tell us that people with a strong sense of wellbeing share five simple habits – staying connected with others, keeping the body moving whether it's gardening, going for a run or bike ride or playing sport, taking time every day to enjoy the simple pleasures, learning new things to stay fresh and giving back to their friends and community. These are the basics of wellbeing. Make these habits part of your daily life and you'll be in a lot better shape to deal with life's challenges when they come. Regular habits have a positive, cumulative effect over time and keep you in a good frame of mind.

Connect

Developing friendships and spending time with your mates makes a big difference to how you feel. Even in a busy life, you should try and make it a priority. When you do, the rewards are huge. Having a good circle of friends has lots of benefits and can really help reduce the stresses of daily life. Friends provide a friendly ear and support. They lighten the load.

Take notice

Taking notice of the small things in life that boost your mood makes a big difference. When we get busy our minds get cluttered with all kinds of stuff. Paying attention to the world around you, even for a few moments, can make you feel more calm and relaxed. Each day take a few moments to be more aware of what's important to you, and what you have that you really appreciate.

Give to others

When you give to others, not only do they benefit but it makes you feel happier too. There are lots of ways you can give. It may be spending time with your kids, or supporting an employee who is having a tough time. It may be helping out at the school fair or offering to feed your neighbours' dogs so they can have a break.



Keep learning

No matter what age you are, learning new things is good for your brain. It keeps your thinking flexible and makes life more interesting. Being curious and learning new things about your business or other interests will help you be a better grower.

Be active

Keeping active is a proven way to feel good. Working up a sweat releases endorphins in your system that make you feel fresher and better able to deal with challenges when they arise. Make physical activity a habit – at least 30 minutes of movement a day. Regular exercise is not just for professional athletes. It really is a game-changer for lifting your mood and making you work-fit.

Invest in your

Wellbeing Bank Account

As we experience stressful situations and knock-backs in life, our natural supply of wellbeing gets depleted. These are like withdrawals from our wellbeing account.

The goal is not to get into an overdraft situation with continual withdrawals. If that continues too long, we lose our energy and sense of purpose, and head towards feelings of depression and hopelessness.

Instead, we need to make small, regular wellbeing 'investments' so that we'll have something to draw on when the going gets tough.

Farmstrong's 5 Ways to Wellbeing are a great place to start. Over time these daily habits make a huge difference to how we cope with the tough times that inevitably crop up.



One way of thinking about wellbeing is like investments in a bank account. If we invest wisely and often, even with little amounts, **we get big dividends over time.**

Investing in wellbeing

So how can we offset inevitable wellbeing withdrawals with wellbeing investments? The first step is to do what we can to reduce any unnecessary stress from our business and personal life.



We can do this by:

- identifying risks and planning for them
- prioritising work tasks
- not over-committing
- minimising contact with very negative people
- being well-organised.

In addition to the ***5 Ways to Wellbeing***, which are like your five-a-day fruit and vegetables but for the mind, there are also other wellbeing fundamentals which are discussed in this book – for example, making sure you get a good night's sleep, good nutrition, and countering negative thoughts. Topping up your wellbeing bank account is a definite win-win situation. It reduces risks of mental ill health and brings business and social benefits at the same time. In a busy industry like horticulture, it's easy to put off your own wellbeing because so much needs to be done. But this is a false economy in the long run as you are neglecting the most important asset in your business - you.

Common withdrawals

Growers and farmers have told us that the following situations make a dent in their wellbeing, that is a withdrawal from their wellbeing bank account:

- having too much to do all of the time
- lack of sleep
- anxiety about the weather
- relentless compliance obligations
- not getting time away from the business
- staffing problems
- financial uncertainty.

These situations lead to negative emotions like frustration, anxiety, anger, guilt and feeling overwhelmed, which after a while puts a strain on our wellbeing.



Sleep

the performance wonder-drug

Farmers want to perform well so they can be successful in their business, provide for their family and contribute to their community. Quality sleep should be a big part of the picture to get there, as effective as any performance drug, and without the side effects.

Over the last couple of decades there have been huge advances in sleep science. While you will be mostly fine (at least in the short term) if you are not getting enough sleep, the benefits of having quality sleep are huge. It helps you make better decisions, feel great and be psychologically and physically stronger. It also improves relationships significantly. All of these benefits make it worth prioritising.

The narrative has been that sleep is for wusses and the hard-drivers in business thrive by cutting back on it. The new evidence doesn't support this; sleep is not a waste of time but crucial to clean out toxins, build memory, focus on learning and leave your brain in top shape for performance demands.

It's tempting to take short-cuts with sleep, especially when the list is as long as your arm of things to do. The cumulative effects of this strategy, however, are very damaging for your health.

DID YOU KNOW

- Nearly everyone needs between 7-9 hours sleep a night.
- Not getting enough sleep can increase your risk of heart attacks, strokes, depression, weight gain and lower your immune system.
- Not getting enough sleep puts you at a higher risk of having an accident.

> "**Sleep is crucial** to clean out toxins, build memory, focus on learning and leave your brain in top shape."

TIPS FOR GETTING OFF TO SLEEP

If you're having trouble getting off to sleep, sleep experts recommend:

- **end screen time early in the evening** if possible
- **cool your core body temperature down**. Having a hot shower can do this as it draws heat from your core and actually cools you
- **dim the lights** as you get close to bed-time
- **avoid caffeine** from the afternoon
- **keep alcohol intake moderate**
- **go to bed at a regular time**
- **fill your mind with what you are grateful for**.

If it's hard to sleep because you are going through a stressful time, don't be tough on yourself. That's just one extra stressor you don't need. Getting to sleep can't happen by force of will, only by letting go.

When life is really stressful, you may need to look at other strategies to get some better sleep, such as sharing your worries with someone you trust, asking for help, getting more exercise, having relaxation routines and healthy thinking practices to get some perspective.

USE MEDICATIONS SPARINGLY

Sleeping meds can be useful if you are desperate for some good nights' sleep. But don't become reliant on them. You should not be on sleeping meds for too long. Some are sedative in nature to relieve anxiety and over time can become addictive. If you continue to struggle with sleep, consider seeing a sleep specialist. Investing in this type of expertise is money very well spent.

WAKING AND WORRYING? FIVE GREAT SOLUTIONS

A very common reason for not being able to get back to sleep is lying awake worrying. Typical things farmers tell us trigger sleeplessness are: the weather, problems with staff or contractors, an endless to-do list, financial pressures. Here are some things that you can do to trick the worrying brain into calmness:

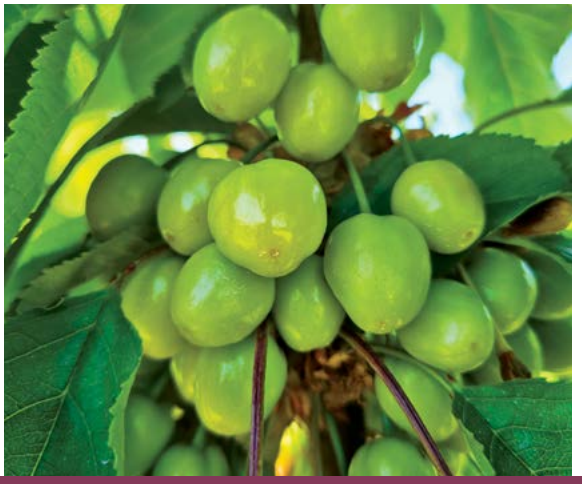
- **Slowly count backwards from 30 in time with your breathing.** Why backwards? Because you have to concentrate a little bit to count this way, it means the mind can't think about other things. If your mind wanders from the counting, stop and start back at 30. This stops you slipping back into worrying again. Counting in time with your breathing relaxes your body.
- **Write a to-do list late in the day** and make an agreement with yourself that you will tackle these tasks in the morning. This tells your worrying brain that you have things under control.
- If you're feeling riled up and tense, with a racing mind, **get up and do some stretching.** It's worth learning proper techniques in advance, e.g. from the gym or a yoga course.
- **Don't turn the light on** if possible as this disrupts the sleep cycle. If you decide to get up, keep a small torch on hand to avoid tripping over things.
- **Learn some relaxation techniques** like meditation, a body scan, visualisation or breathing techniques. If you wake and can't get back to sleep, practice these relaxation techniques in bed.

Putting the right ‘fuel in the tank’

Eating well gives your body the energy and nutrients it needs to perform at its best. The many demands of daily work as a grower however can mean that it’s easy to lose sight of the importance of a good diet.

When we are busy or stressed, eating well is even more important to stop us getting sick and provide the energy and nutrients we need for our physical and emotional health. Wairarapa-based nutritionist Sarah Percy has worked with Farmstrong to create resources for our website. We asked her to share some practical tips about how to eat well and maintain energy levels when you’re going hard-out during the busy season.







“ Whether you’re growing or farming or playing sport, **you need the right ‘fuel in the tank’ to perform at your best.** Eat more unprocessed, natural foods, avoid skipping meals, carry snacks for an energy boost, and don’t forget to stay hydrated.”

Sam Whitelock | Farmstrong Ambassador



Create your own food bank

When you cook a casserole, bolognaise, curry or soup, cook a double or triple batch and freeze half. In no time you will have a freezer 'food bank' to use in the future when work is flat out and time is precious.



Cook once, eat twice

Do a double batch of your meal and use the leftovers in a different dish the next day. Have shepherd pie one night, the next use the leftover mince, mix in chilli beans and serve as Mexican wraps with salad and avocado.



Keep the fridge and pantry well-stocked

Have plenty of quick options handy in the fridge and store cupboard, such as tinned fish, tinned tomatoes, veggies, rice and potatoes so that a balanced meal can be whipped up from what you have on hand.



Grab a break

Taking a break also creates the opportunity to have a nourishing snack. Along with a cuppa, grab a hardboiled egg, or a cold chicken drumstick, fruit muffin, fresh fruit and/or pottle of yoghurt. Remember to try and have nutritional snacks, so rather than grabbing noodles, chips or a chocolate bar when you are hungry, go for a nutritional option instead. It'll make you more productive.



Hydrate and snack

You need to prioritise drinking water. Keep a water bottle handy. Water is definitely best because coffee, tea, caffeinated soft drinks and energy drinks all contain caffeine which is a diuretic so they actually have a dehydrating effect on your body. If you are a tea or coffee drinker, have a drink of water while you're waiting for the kettle to boil. Regular snacks are also important to maintain your energy levels.



Look after yourself

Remember, the number one asset in your business is yourself and the people who work for you. Establishing a habit of eating well brings many benefits. A nutritious, well-balanced diet means that you'll feel fitter, stronger and have improved energy levels. You'll boost your immune system and stay healthier and you'll also think more clearly and handle stress better.

You matter, let's natter

Real-life connections with people close to us, or even casual acquaintances, help make us feel good and make us aware that we are not alone in facing life's challenges.

A key part of a satisfying conversation is being a good listener. Listening is one of the best ways to help someone who is 'doing it tough'.

You don't need to solve their problems, simply listening can help change the way they feel about themselves and the situation they are in. When you listen to someone properly, it helps them feel more in control of their lives and therefore able to find their own solutions.

A good wellbeing boost is to have a conversation with a mate or even a stranger. It might be a staff member or a contractor, or just someone at the supermarket. Try it out and see if it works for you.

> "I know myself, whenever there's been a challenging time, **it's nice to be able talk about it and share the load.** So just listening can be a huge help to someone who is feeling 'under the pump'."
>
> **Sam Whitelock** | Farmstrong Ambassador



How to be a good listener

People worry about what to say when 'being a good listener', but the best approach is usually to say very little. So this makes it easier. Instead of worrying about saying the right thing, focus on the following:

1. Put your judgements to one side. This builds trust and will get people talking more.
2. Don't jump in with your solutions. If you listen openly without interrupting, people will often find their own solutions as they hear themselves talk through a problem.
3. Make sure you are really listening and not distracted by phones or your own thoughts. Use body language to show you are really listening.
4. Focus totally on what they are saying, not rehearsing in your own mind what you want to tell them when there is a pause in the conversation.
5. Allow for pauses in the conversation without getting uncomfortable. It doesn't matter if there is some silence at the start. Leave space for people to feel comfortable and start talking.



Sam Whitelock
FARMSTRONG AMBASSADOR

The 5 Ss

Getting the most out of your day

The research into wellbeing is very clear – there are some fundamentals you have to get right to thrive.



Sleep

Make sure you have the right quality and quantity of sleep before you start work. Most of us need seven to nine hours of sleep each day to give our bodies a chance to repair and re-energise for the next day. Without the right amount of sleep, you won't function at your best.



Start

Our brains love certainty so plan out each day with clear intentions of what lies ahead and what's needed to be at your best. Prioritise the things you can control. List out what needs to be done, make a plan about what to attack first and break down the work into achievable amounts so you're not overwhelmed.



Sustain

Manage your energy levels carefully throughout the day.

Make sure you eat properly and hydrate to keep the body 'fueled up'. Schedule breaks and micropauses during the day to recharge physically and mentally and maintain a good headspace. Taking time to slow down like this re-focuses your thinking and makes you more productive. Think in ways that keep things in perspective and help boost your mood.



Stop

Switch off from work at the end of the day and maximise your recovery time. Make sure you set aside some quality time each weekend to do other things you enjoy such as sport, hobbies or catching up with friends. You'll come back to work feeling fresher and more motivated.



Socialise

Tap into your wider social networks and have an enjoyable life outside of work.

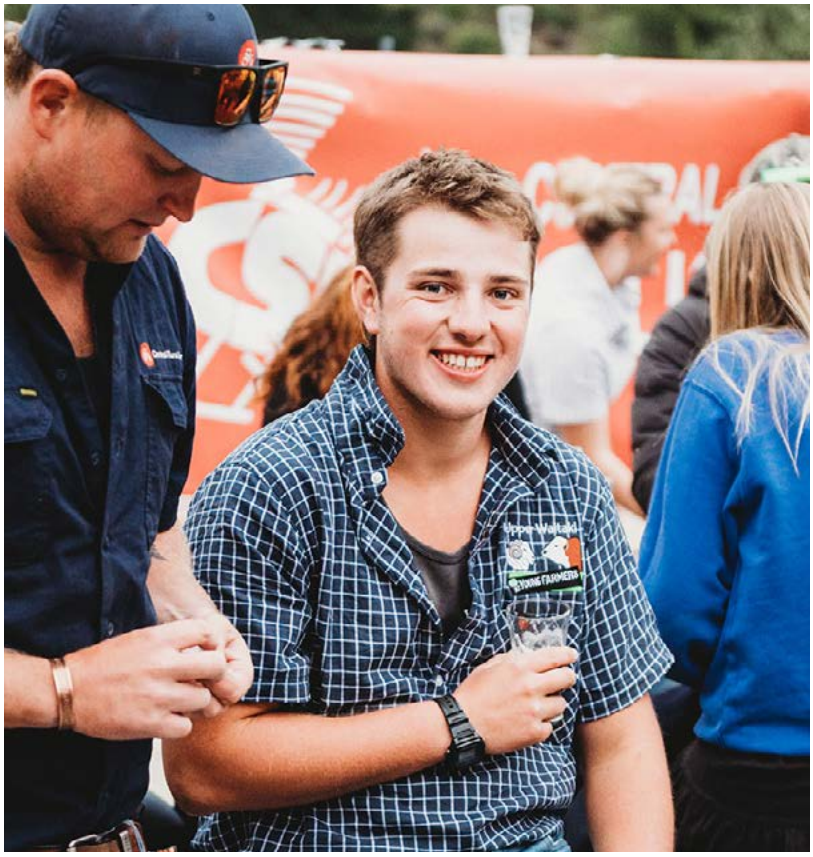
Make sure you have a good support crew to help you unpack your day. If you keep every work challenge inside your own head, life soon becomes overwhelming, so don't bottle things up. Getting things off your chest with family and friends relieves stress. You can also help others doing it tough, simply by being a good listener.


PLAN


Foothills Young Farmers
Foothills Young Farmers


CARRIERS ARMS
adidas


YDECTIN
Worms Longer
BLK




FNG
YOUNG
FARMER

“ Just like you can become physically fitter, you can also build your mental strength and fitness to manage challenges. **That’s what being Farmstrong is all about**.”

Sam Whitelock | Farmstrong Ambassador



Power Up Your Mental Fitness



Power up your mental fitness



Just like you can become physically fitter, you can also build your mental strength and fitness to manage the ups and downs of life and work, writes Farmstrong content expert **Hugh Norriss.**

That's what being Farmstrong is all about. Getting more out of life and work and keeping well, despite the challenges that come your way.

The challenges in agriculture aren't going away anytime soon – the impact of severe weather, market changes, regulations, time pressures. Challenges like these are part and parcel of working in the industry, whether you are a farmer, grower, team leader or working in a pack house.

What's important is that people develop habits that make them mentally stronger and more resilient, rather than waiting for the pressures of work to take their toll.

The Farmstrong mental skills toolbox is a great place to start. These are skills that can help everyone in this busy, results-driven industry to deal with the inevitable ups and downs of the job. When these skills become ingrained, people are in a stronger position to focus on the things that really matter and maintain a good headspace for decision-making when the pressure comes on.



The most important part of staying mentally fit is to make your own wellbeing a priority, no matter how busy the week gets. Make time for activities that help you de-stress and recharge your batteries.

Here are some Farmstrong tools and tips to make the day work better for you. Mental skills are like any skills, you can't just go from zero to 100. It's like learning to sail. It takes practice and turning these skills into daily habits. The Farmstrong approach is to apply your mental skills to the little problems in everyday life, so you can scale things up when the big challenges arrive.

Even small changes in mental behaviour can make a big difference when we experience storms in life. Different things work for different people so lock in what works for you.

" Mental skills are like any skills, **you can't just go from zero to 100."**



Control the controllables

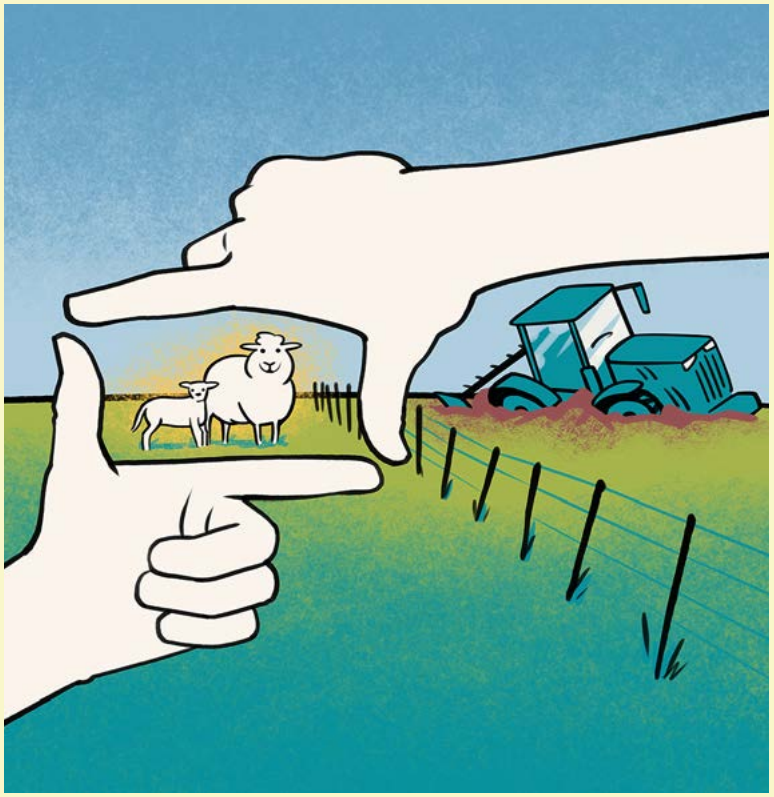
Working in agriculture and horticulture can be an emotional rollercoaster. There are so many factors outside of your control like severe weather events including wind, hail and frost, fluctuating export markets or supply chain pressures. A great way to relieve stress and worry is to work out **what you can control and what you can't.**



- Grab a piece of paper. Divide the page in two and on one side **list the things you feel you have some control over and on the other side list the things you don't.**
- **Aim to let go 'mentally'** of the things you can't control.
- **Now prioritise the things you can control**. Focus on the top two or three things so you have a plan about what to attack first. This allows you to keep moving forward with a sense of control, so you're not overwhelmed by the scale of everything.
- You could also include another column called 'Things I can influence'. Sometimes we can't fully control a situation, but we still have some influence. A good example might be checking to ensure the equipment which is crucial to your operation is well-maintained.

Reframe a bad day

When you are really feeling stressed, there is a helpful technique called 'reframing' to feel less negative and achieve better outcomes. To use it when you are in the heat of the moment – you could start by doing some deep breathing to help you calm down and focus.



1. Ask yourself if there are other explanations for what has happened that are less negative? For example, if someone was rude to you, were they just having a bad day? Or did you get overly defensive?

2. **Get some perspective** – take a step back and ask yourself 'how important is this setback really in the overall scheme of things?'

3. **Talk to someone** who will help you see any upsides and talk up your good qualities. Avoid people who are blamers and complainers.

4. Even if the situation is difficult, ask yourself if there is anything that you could learn from what has happened so things go better in the future? **Sometimes a setback can be a useful lesson**.

Resist the urge to complain

It's fair enough to complain if we get terrible service or a bad product, but complaining about life is generally not helpful. Complaining can feel good in the short term, but after a while it really takes a toll on your wellbeing.



That's because negativity is contagious like a virus. If you complain a lot, you spread your bad mood, which means that people around you become more negative and feed it back to you, making you feel even worse. It's also true, however, that sometimes we just need to vent. If you do that, choose a trusted listener, and tell them you just need to vent and you are not looking for a solution.

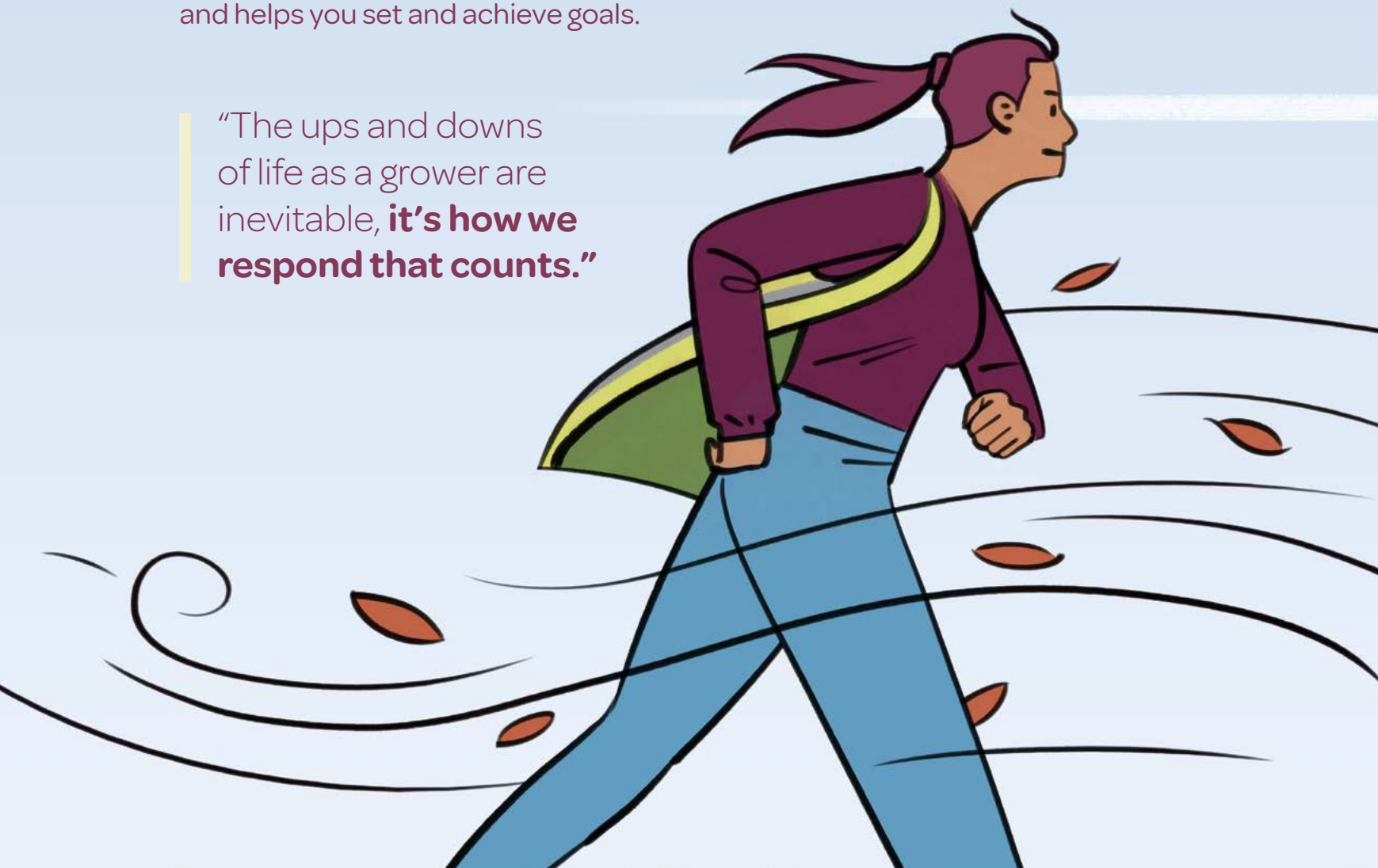
> " The way I like to think about complaining is a bit like a tap – turn it all the way on and get things off your chest, **but then turn it all the way off**, rather than leaving it on and it's dripping the whole time. That's an approach that works for me."
>
> **Sam Whitelock** | Farmstrong Ambassador

Know your 'why'

Having purpose and direction helps you prioritise what matters in life and work and allows you to walk away from thoughts, people or activities that don't help with where you want to head. It's also a key driver to staying motivated when things get tough and helps you set and achieve goals.

Sometimes it can be hard to work out your purpose. Let's face it, it's easier just to 'go with the flow' but in the long run, allowing other people or random circumstances to dictate what you do, can be a recipe for feeling lost and resentful. Knowing your 'why' puts even the toughest day in the orchard or the packhouse into perspective, because you know why you are doing it.

> "The ups and downs of life as a grower are inevitable, **it's how we respond that counts."**



Choose what you pay attention to

In times of stress, focus your attention on things that are going to boost your mental health, not make you feel anxious and depressed.



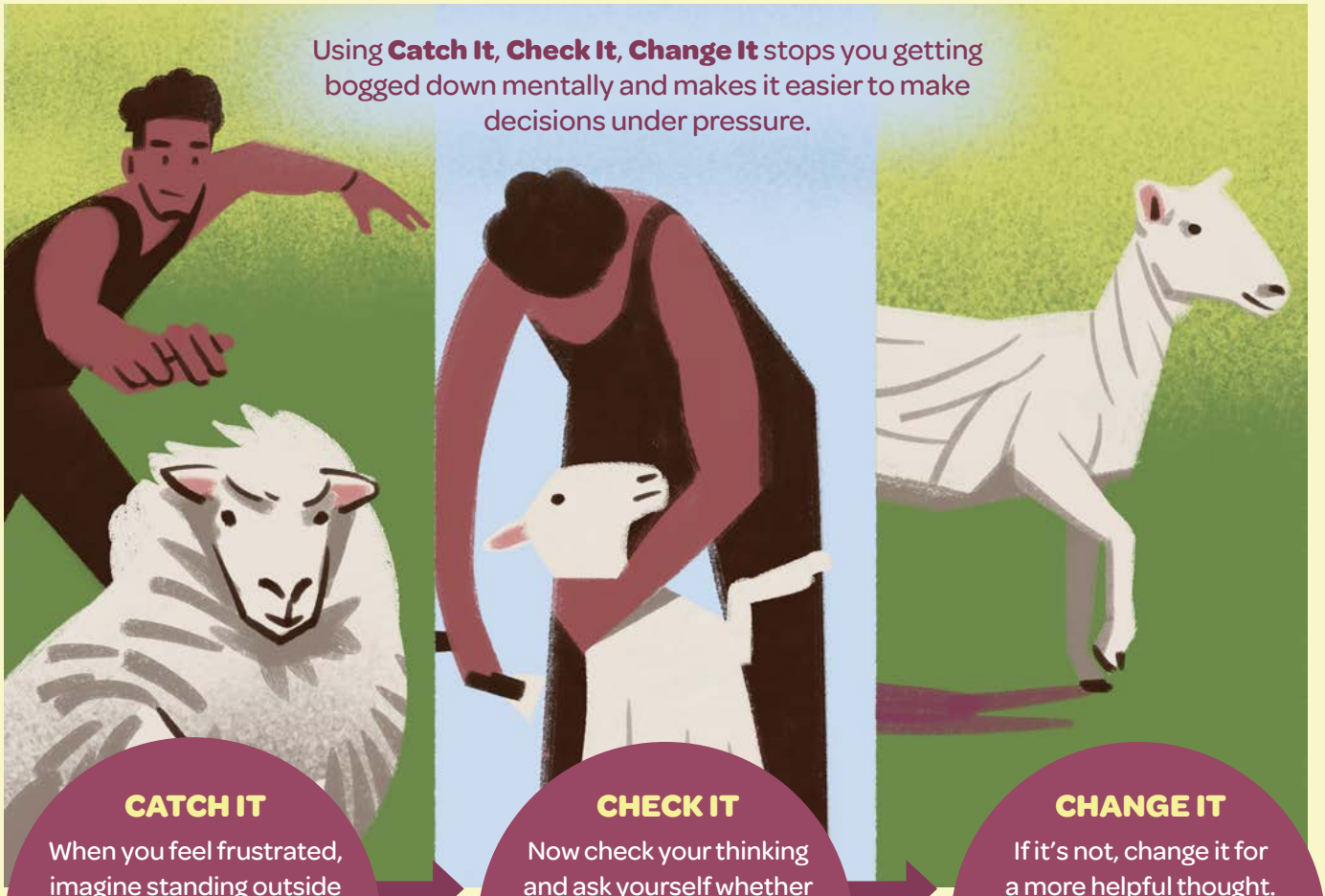
You can achieve this by hanging out with people who are positive and encouraging rather than those who are overly negative, pessimistic or judgemental. It's been said we become the average of the five people we spend the most time with.

It's also worth reflecting on what is taking your attention. The attention economy is a huge business with all manner of phone apps, social media and entertainment platforms, all wanting to grab your attention as part of their business model, but without necessarily having your best interests at heart. The news too is dominated by negative headlines, raising fears and anxieties. This is what we consume without thinking about it.

Of the millions of bits of information our brain takes in each day, we can only pay attention to a tiny fraction of them. It pays to choose carefully because what we choose will influence our outlook and have a big impact on how effective we will be.

Catch It, Check It, Change It

Whether you are harvesting, pruning or managing staff in the packhouse, everyone has days when nothing seems to go right. This can lead to a downward spiral of negative thoughts and make a bad situation even worse. The good news is you can train your brain to have more helpful thoughts using **Catch It, Check It, Change It**.



Practice 'box breathing'

When we feel stressed out, our breathing patterns can become short and shallow, keeping our nervous system stuck in a high state of alert and starving our brain of the oxygen we need to think clearly and stay calm.

Using a simple deep-breathing technique like 'box breathing' is proven to reduce stress and anxiety levels in high-pressure situations.

Box breathing gets its name from the four sides of a box. It involves breathing in for a count of four, holding your breath for a count of four, breathing out for a count of four and then holding your breath for a count of four. Repeat this cycle ten times. At each stage of (1) breathing in, (2) holding, (3) breathing out, (4) holding, imagine that you are moving round the four sides of the box.

To get the full benefit of 'box breathing', it's important than when you breath in you are doing this slowly and from deep in your lungs. Box breathing brings a sense of calm and relaxation by slowing down your heart rate, reducing stress hormones and increasing the oxygen levels in your body.

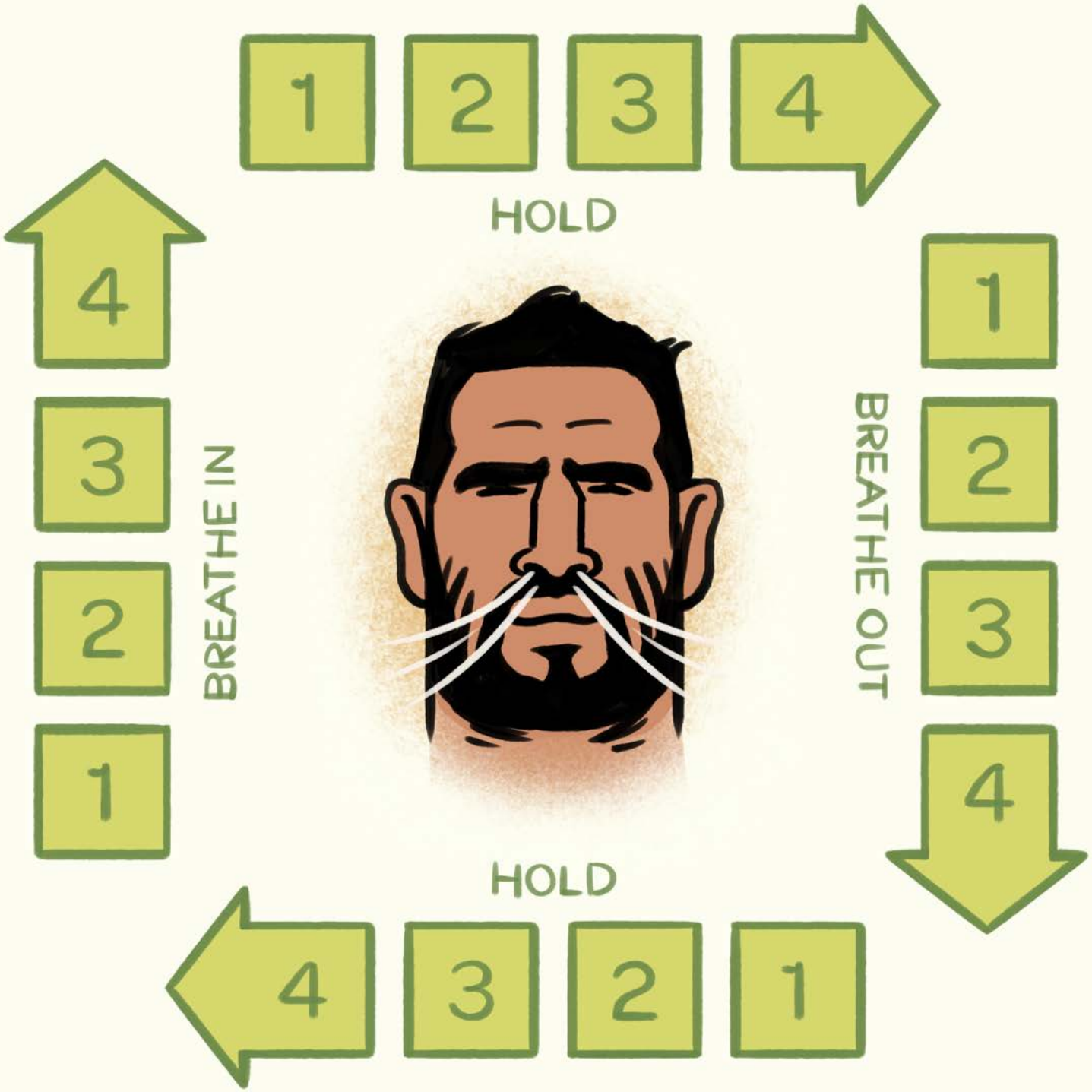
TO BOX BREATHE:

- **breathe in** for a count of four
- **hold your breath** for a count of four
- **breathe out** for a count of four
- **hold your breath** for a count of four

Repeat this cycle ten times.

At each stage of (1) breathing in, (2) holding, (3) breathing out, (4) holding, imagine that you are moving round the four sides of the box.

> "Box breathing will help you improve your headspace in a challenging situation."


1
2
3
4
HOLD
4
3
2
1
BREATHE IN
1
2
3
4
BREATHE OUT
4
3
2
1
HOLD

Develop a healthy mindset

Mindsets are the way we choose to view the world. They reflect our core ideas, attitudes and explanations about how the world is. Mindsets drive much of our behaviour. They affect how we think, what we decide to do, our confidence, our relationships and ultimately our physical and mental health.

Mindsets also create the 'self-talk' in our heads. This can be encouraging and forgiving but more often than not, for many of us, it's harsh and a source of great stress. Research shows that people with more of a 'flexible/growth' mindset, tend to be more successful in business and life, and enjoy better mental and physical health.

It's worth exploring your mindset to see if you are driven by mindsets you'd rather not have. Here are some examples of healthy and unhealthy mindsets.



Examples of generally healthy/helpful mindsets

- I can change, I enjoy learning new things.
- When bad things happen, I feel the pain but learn from what happened and grow.
- All of us struggle with life, no one is perfect and no one is completely bad.
- It's better to trust people, after taking appropriate precautions, even if I get ripped off once in a while.
- The world generally supports me in what I want to do.
- I know some stuff but want to keep learning.
- I'm a good person at heart but a work-in-progress.
- My health is good but needs maintenance and investment for the future.
- I'm grateful for what I have.
- Stress is uncomfortable but gives me energy and drive to change what I need to change.
- Other people's happiness and attitude is not my responsibility, it is their own.



Examples of generally unhealthy/unhelpful mindsets

- I can't change, I'm just the way I am so I don't need to consider doing anything different.
- When bad things happen I become a victim.
- I'm ok, it's just everyone else who has the problem.
- People generally can't be trusted.
- The world is out to get me. I need to be suspicious or fight back in any situation.
- I already know all I need to know.
- It's too risky to try new things in case I fail and feel humiliated.
- I am bullet-proof, I don't need to be that proactive about my health.
- I haven't been given what I deserve in life.
- Stress is debilitating and makes me sick.
- I always need to please people to make sure they are not upset.






BUSHBUCK
BUSHBUCK


GILBERT



"Pressure is pressure, whether you're a farmer or a rugby player. How do I deal with it? I travel towards it, embrace it as part of my job and then, when I get the opportunity, I step away from it and make sure I recharge."

Sam Whitelock | Farmstrong Ambassador

More Ways to Wellbeing

– Taking it to the next level



Shifting the dial

What the science tells us is that mental health is just like physical health. It can be good or bad. If we think about mental health as a continuum from minus five to plus five, minus one to minus five means people are feeling stressed, anxious, depressed or not coping. That's where most discussion usually ends and that's what needs to change.



We need to start focusing on the positive – the zero to plus five – so we start building people's resilience. Zero to plus five might involve activities such as adopting the 5 Ways, looking after the basics even during busy periods, exploring our mindset and learning flexible thinking strategies so people have the mental fitness to cope with change and pressure.

This approach is going to result in all sorts of benefits. The research shows people will be more productive, they'll enjoy better business success and when they do strike challenges and setbacks, it will lessen their impact.

It's a bit like sport. If you want to do well at a sport, you have to be fit and do the training so you are ready for the pressure of a game. It's the same with our mental health. If we "train" by developing habits that are good for our mental health, we will be in a far better position to handle the tough stuff when it comes along.

> "We need to start focusing on the positive – the zero to plus five – **so we start building people's resilience."**

Challenge and response

Major setbacks are a fact of life for all of us. In one form or another, they are unavoidable. There are many examples of setbacks which farmers have to deal with in this book. A severe frost, flooding, staff shortages, crop disease, falling commodity prices – there are many sources of stress and uncertainty.



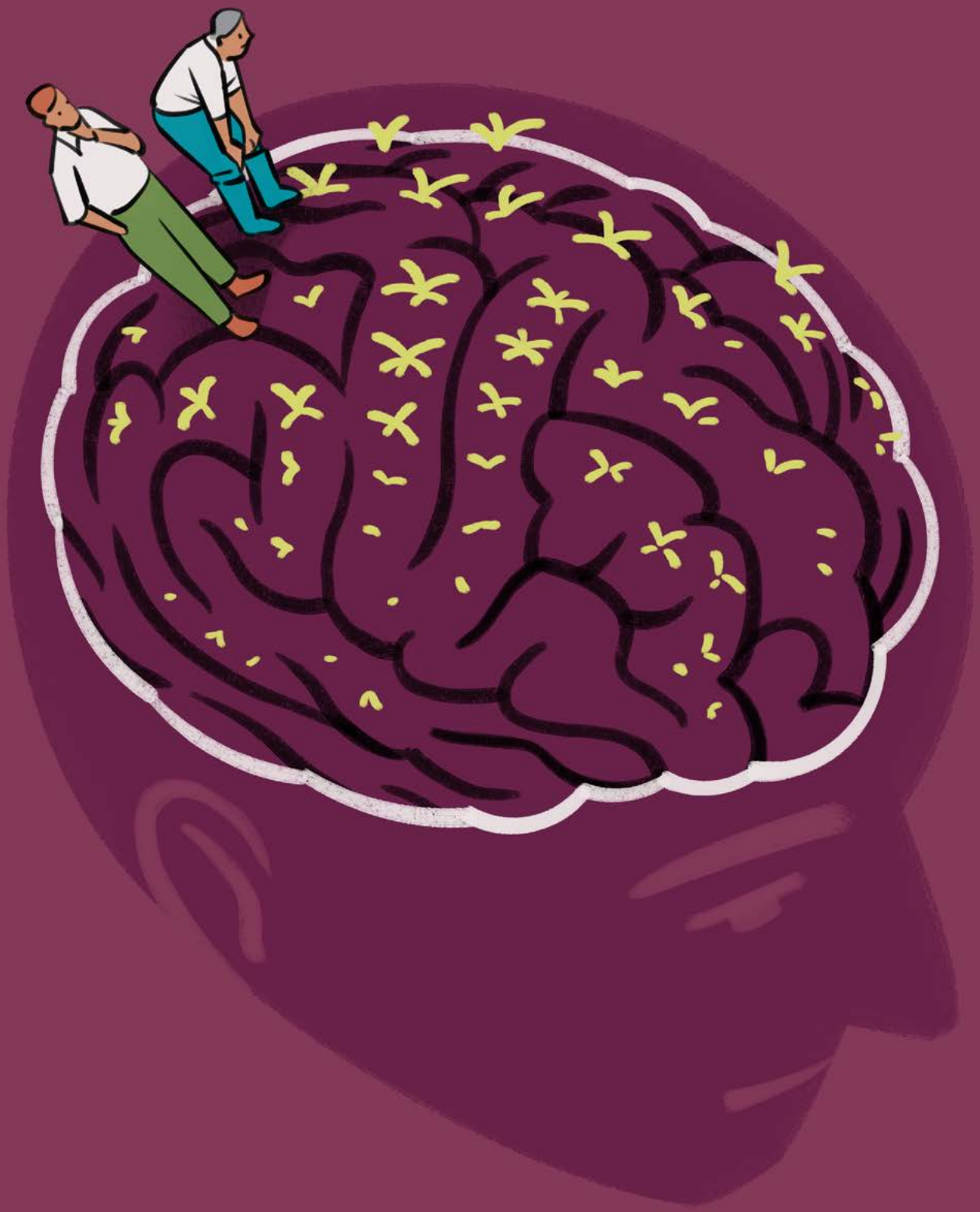
But as you can see from the stories in this book, what matters most is how we respond to what happens to us. We have the power to choose our reaction. A good analogy is to think of the image of two arrows. When we are struck by an arrow – there's been a hailstorm or a flood, a market downturn – there's nothing we can do about it and there's no doubt it's very stressful. We wouldn't be human if we didn't feel the pain and disappointment of major setbacks.

There is a second arrow however that we do have control over. The second arrow relates to our reaction to what is happening. If we respond with excessive worrying or complaining or catastrophising, our anxiety and suffering is prolonged. It worsens how we and others around us are going to feel.

The lesson is that while we cannot control the first arrow, we have the power to choose our reaction and avoid the second arrow, which reduces suffering. The second arrow is optional. We fire it ourselves.

Taking control of our thoughts and directing them to a more positive future reduces the toll that tough times take on us. This insight is a real game-changer. Human beings have the remarkable power to change their mindset, even in very difficult situations. This is not pie-in-the-sky thinking – it's demonstrated over and over in the stories in this book.

It's a good idea to practice being aware of your mindset, when confronted with the smaller stresses of life. Be aware of your thoughts and then try consciously replacing them with healthier ones. This habit can make a big difference. Put simply: the quality of our thoughts affect the quality of our life.



Don't believe all your thoughts

To develop a generally more positive outlook, we need to understand how our mind works. We have at least 6,000 thoughts each day. Most of them are junk.

Obviously, our thoughts come from the brain. The brain is just one of a number of vital organs in the body, along with lungs, liver, heart and kidneys, all doing an amazing job to keep us alive.

The brain's main role is to try and predict the future, based on our past perceptions and current sensory information, so it can manage the body's energy effectively. To save the body, and brain's energy (it takes about 20 percent of the total), the brain takes shortcuts, and encourages us to be lazy, eat too much, and to fall into bad habits. The brain is worried that scarcity and danger (social and physical) is just around the corner, so it has a strong negativity and scarcity bias.

> A lot of our thoughts reflect the brain trying to look after us, but not always being that helpful.

A lot of our thoughts reflect the brain trying to look after us, but not always being that helpful.

The way to manage this better is by building greater self-awareness, and getting inputs other than our own repetitive and biased thinking.

Options include:

- **building time into your day to check on your thinking** so you keep heading towards your goals in work and life
- **noticing and celebrating the 'small wins' each day in a journal**
- **setting a goal that's meaningful** for you and enlisting a coach/mentor to help you achieve it
- **getting regular feedback on your thinking** from people you trust
- **exploring what other farmers and growers do to stay Farmstrong.**

Mind-body connection

Just as a grower runs an orchard as one integrated system with many different inputs across the seasons, so too our mental health is a complex system with many different inputs that affect our mood.

New research over the last couple of decades shows that physical health and mental health are very interconnected and affect each other. It feels like our thinking happens somewhere else but in fact the brain is deeply embedded in all our other bodily processes. It is just one organ in the body along with our heart, lungs and digestive system. It's all part of one amazing system.

There are four physical behaviours that we can control that greatly affect how we think - **Exercise, Sleep, Breathing** and **Diet**.

Doing these things sounds simple but when you are really slammed and up against it, it is easy to sacrifice sleep, to skip meals, to get carried away with emotions rather than take a deep breath and calm yourself. It's in times of crisis however that we most need to be functioning well. That's when attending to the basics is most important.

EXERCISE

Exercise, often something as simple as going for a walk, has been shown in many studies to boost our mood and is as effective as using anti-depressants. Physical activity triggers the release of endorphins which reduce stress and lift our mood. Regular exercise has also been shown to support memory function and help regulate emotions.

SLEEP

Sleep is of huge importance for wellbeing. It used to be viewed as a waste of time or a sign of laziness but it plays a vital role in restoring the brain and the body. People with insomnia, for example, are 10 times more likely to have depression and 17 times more likely to have anxiety than the general population. Sleep is fundamental to our wellbeing.

BREATHING

Breathing exercises, focusing intentionally on your breathing, improves mental health by regulating the nervous system, reducing cortisol levels and easing anxiety and stress. In a stressful moment when something triggers you, take three deep breaths so you don't just react in the heat of the moment, and then go from there. Quite literally, give yourself some breathing space.

DIET

What we eat has also been shown to have a significant effect on low mood and depression. Reducing ultra-processed foods and maintaining a diet with plenty of fruits and vegetables lifts our mood and contributes significantly to wellbeing.



Flexible thinking

To cope when the pressure is on and the to-do list is endless, we need to develop the capacity to be open to new ideas and be adaptable.

In farming and growing, there are many so variables at play - such as the weather, the markets, staffing issues or competing priorities on your to-do list - that you need a plan B for when things don't go to plan. The ability to pivot is essential for success and for your own enjoyment of life.

The challenge is to think flexibly and be able to adapt to a range of scenarios. We cannot rely on the way we have always done things. Life is too random for that. As Farmstrong Ambassador Sam Whitelock notes: "Just because you've done something a certain way before and it's been successful, doesn't mean there's not a better way of doing it. And things change. What used to work doesn't anymore."

What's required is a frame of mind that is open to new ideas and approaches. Things that have some flexibility in them don't break as easily, they can bend or bounce back. Rigid things are more likely to snap when the pressure comes on. It's like that with our thinking. The person with a flexible mindset can adjust better and reshape themselves, even when the pressure is on.

The science around resilience tells us that setbacks and dealing with unexpected or challenging events are part of our growth, provided we have a good social network and we've learnt the skills to adapt to change. These skills include building our abilities in asking for help, flexible thinking, reframing and getting perspective.

What is certain in life is that every setback and difficult situation is at the very least an opportunity to learn something and grow if we are open to doing so. And there's every chance of success if we're up for a challenge.

The truth is we learn and grow by having life as we *don't* want it. This pushes us out of our comfort zone and makes us dig deep, finding the grit we didn't know we had.

A good analogy is to think of your average cat. Cats hate getting wet and will go to great lengths to avoid water, but when pushed by the need to survive, they are capable swimmers. They don't like water but they'll swim when they have to. That ability to adapt and do what is required in a difficult situation is a great mental skill to add to your toolkit.



Find your tribe

Top of the list when it comes to good health and wellbeing is having mates we can rely on and being part of a supportive community. Mixing with people from all walks of life gives us perspective and increases our empathy for others.

The impact of a support crew on our mental health and wellbeing is often underrated. When we have friends we can talk things over with, we are much more resilient, much more able to go back and deal with what needs to be done.

Staying connected takes effort but, in terms of health and wellbeing, the rewards are enormous. Research shows our health is strongly determined by the extent to which we are supported by, and contribute to, a group.

Often we neglect catching up with friends when we are busy. The endless to-do list gets in the way and it seems easier to plough on with the next job. However it's when we are busy for a sustained period that we most benefit from a natter with mates.

Spending time with your friends makes a big difference to how you view your situation and how you feel about yourself.

Being well connected with others is a win-win. Positive mental health is contagious. The more of it you have, the more it will spread naturally through your friends and social networks. Everybody benefits.



> "Staying connected takes effort but ...**the rewards are enormous.**"



"**Being Farmstrong is about enjoying farming and making your wellbeing a priority in a busy job.** To get the best out of your farm or orchard, first, you need to get the best out of yourself."

Sam Whitelock | Farmstrong Ambassador


WARRZ









"Whether you are a farmer, grower or professional athlete, **locking in Farmstrong habits has a positive, cumulative effect over time** and makes you much more resilient."

Sam Whitelock | Farmstrong Ambassador

To check out our resources, head to:
www.farmstrong.co.nz

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Live Well Farm Well

Founding Partners: Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand *mauri tū, mauri ora* FMG

Strategic Partner: ACC